Chapter 4 – Agency Collaboration

Agency collaboration and cooperation is crucial for successful senior services. Communities are being challenged to provide services that will enable seniors to maintain strong connections with and continue to contribute to their communities in order to maintain their quality of life. It is imperative that libraries address this challenge with their community partners.

Cooperation, Collaboration and Partnering

Building partnerships in the public and private sector can be a challenging process. It requires patience, time, and leadership commitment. However, working with other agencies will benefit the library, its partners, and most importantly, older adults. Developing relationships with community agencies and businesses that serve seniors will allow library staff to expand their horizons, become more informed, and be alert to trends. Best of all, library services for older adults can be integrated into the greater community of services and increase the library's potential for reaching more seniors.

For the purposes of this chapter, the words partner and partnership will be used to describe the relationship between libraries and community agencies. In reality, multiple models or stages of coalition building exist. Feinberg and Feldman provide an excellent overview of the coalition building continuum.

Networking is the first step in coalition building. Networking facilitates communication among individuals, requires a minimal level of interaction and allows for agency information exchange. Coordination, the next stage, involves two or more agencies combining efforts to serve a common audience. For example, the library may develop a special bibliography for the customers of the local Area Agency on Aging. Cooperation is a higher level of commitment by the agencies that results in better delivery of services. As an example, the public library may provide workshops on computers at the local senior center. The senior center benefits with new services for its customers and the library reaches a new audience. A partnership takes the relationship further, usually involving projects that are new to the partners and some level of financial responsibility on the part of each agency. Partnerships require a great deal of communication and trust. An agreement between the parks and recreation department and the library to jointly sponsor training for their employees regarding effective services for seniors is an example of a partnership. Collaboration is the final step in coalition building. It involves a formal relationship and a commitment to a common goal that can only be achieved by working together.

The lines that delineate these stages are not firm or easy to draw. In fact, libraries will shift between the stages at different times with different partners. The stage in which the library is operating is secondary to the fact that coalition building is having a positive affect on services for seniors.

The Value of Cooperation

Cooperation between libraries and community agencies creates win-win situations. Libraries have a great deal to offer agencies serving seniors. Sandra Feinberg describes library assets that are valuable to potential community partners. The library provides free access to information and is seen as the community's information center. In large and small cities, the library is the community cultural center, offering opportunities for lifelong learning, recreation, and intellectual development. The library possesses a positive image, and communities respect and appreciate the library as an institution. Libraries have natural audiences, many of whom use the services and resources regularly. Potential partners can use the library as an information clearinghouse. The library is generally centrally located and accessible for meetings and gatherings. It provides a safe, free, and neutral place for programs.

As mentioned previously, partners and their audiences benefit when agencies cooperate. Nevins, and Feldman and Jordan offer several advantages that result from cooperative relationships.

- Cooperation allows access to resources the partners may not otherwise have. These may include staff, technology, information, knowledge or money.

- Cooperation conserves resources and avoids duplication of services.

- Cooperative relationships bring the advantage of ideas, synergies, and shared expertise. A variety of perspectives can generate new ideas, new solutions, and new opportunities.

- Cooperation creates connections. Partners can facilitate and support each other's efforts because each entity is hooked into communities the others may not reach, or may carry weight the others do not. There is great value in being connected.

- Cooperation builds critical mass. Partnerships allow agencies to do as a group what cannot be done individually.

- Cooperation allows agencies to become more effective in achieving their goals.

- Cooperation improves community-wide information sharing, service delivery and distribution of materials.

- Cooperative partners can reach new and greater audiences through combined efforts.

- Cooperation increases the credibility of all agencies involved.

Community partners working together to serve a common audience can achieve a number of results that would be less effective (and sometimes impossible) if the agencies worked alone. Partnering with other senior-serving agenices will allow the library and its partners to serve new roles by:

- Reaching new audiences.

- Adding or sharing resources for programs and services.

- Serving as resources for each other's projects, programs and training.

- Developing new resources, such as directories, bibliographies and resource listings.

- Marketing each other's programs and services.

- Planning and developing cooperative programs.

- Writing joint grants.

- Cross-training staff.

Adapted from: Feldman, Sari and Barbara Jordan. "Together Is Better: The Role of Libraries as Natural Community Partners." *Zero to Three*. (December 2000/January 2001): 30–37.

Networking and Coalition Building

The goal to focus on when cooperating with one or more agencies is reaching unserved audiences. The goal of most tax-supported agencies is to effectively and efficiently serve their target audience. Lack of funding, staff, and other resources often create obstructions to this goal. Agencies that network find new ways to stretch resources and reach new audiences, such as sharing meeting space and mailing lists and promoting each other's programs and services.

In the area of senior services, the best place to begin any cooperation effort is with the regional Area Agency on Aging (AAA). The staff at your local AAA already work closely with many agencies which serve seniors. Find a mutual time to meet with the AAA director or other staff to learn more about the programs and services they offer seniors. Educate the AAA staff about services and materials the library has available which may benefit AAA, other agencies, and community seniors. Ask if a coalition of agencies serving seniors already exists. If one does, request an invitation to speak to the membership about the library and information regarding coalition membership.

If a coalition or network of senior services agencies does not exist, consider taking a leadership role and developing one. Contact leaders in the senior services arena and invite them to an open house and sharing session at the library. Review the agencies and organizations listed in Chapter 8, and comb the lists in the Community Connection database and in resource directories developed by your local AAA. Think beyond the scope of the traditional information partners. Look at organizations that also provide lifelong learning opportunities, such as museums, botanical gardens, and social clubs. Telephone the key person at each agency and invite them personal-

ly to a group meeting or open house. Be prepared to distribute library literature and share information about library services, resources and programs at the meeting. Promote the availability of library meeting space, technology, the expertise of library staff, existing audiences and other, less "tangible," resources the library can offer community agencies.

Find out as much as you can about the organizations. If the group of organizations is numerous, you may develop a program schedule which will allow each agency representative to make a short presentation describing the services and goals of his or her agency. The coalition can be an informal, monthly gathering of agency staffs who meet to share information about the services they provide, new trends or legislation that may affect their services or audience, and other issues. From these monthly meetings, partnering opportunities will develop. Once developed, the coalition must be maintained and remain flexible. With agency staff turnover and funding changes it takes some work to keep networks up to date. However, the results are well worth the effort and time.

While its focus is family and youth services, Feinberg's and Feldman's *Serving Families and Children Through Partnerships* provides an excellent chapter on developing a community coalition.

Developing Partnerships

As relationships between agencies develop, opportunities for partnering will evolve. In addition to networking with agencies which serve seniors, library administrators must make time to get acquainted with potential partners by joining community organizations and participating in their activities. This establishes an important foundation for future collaborations. Involvement in community organizations and businesses allows potential partners to become familiar with the library's mission and understand how a partnership can be mutually beneficial.

Partnering results when a more formal arrangement develops between the library and one or more agencies or businesses. As Feldman and Jordan note, "…partnering is a one-to-one proposition, starting with a person-to-person relationship. Although the goal may be to establish an official agency-to-agency collaboration, the partnership begins with individuals." Community coalitions give library staff the opportunity to learn more about other agencies serving seniors. Opportunities for partnerships exist with these agencies and with community organizations and businesses.

Library partnerships do not evolve overnight. Patience and an ability to see the larger picture are key attributes for library staff involved in developing partnerships. Samuel Morrison, director of the Broward County (Florida) Library says, "The likelihood of success increases when participants are able to check their egos at the door and focus on the service benefits to be achieved." Allow time for issues to be resolved, relationships and trust to be developed and learn to wait for the right time.

Commitment on the part of the leader of the potential partner organization or business is crucial. With a vision for what the partnership can achieve, this person can gain the commitment and enthusiasm of the organization's staff to implement the project or program.

Following are steps to develop partnerships.

1. Research potential partners.

   - Use items such as annual reports, agency publications and newspaper files to conduct preliminary research. Determine if the organization is respected within its own network.

   - Partnerships are mutually beneficial relationships. What can the library and partnering agencies contribute?

   - What staff expertise is available?

   - What funding opportunities are available? In some instances, one agency may provide funding while the other provides expertise and staff. In other instances, joint grant opportunities may exist.

   - Does one agency attract an audience the other wants to reach?

   - Does the program have the potential for being "ground-breaking?"

   - Examine the value of spaces, buildings, and physical equipment, including technology and hardware.

   - What print and information resources can partners contribute?

   - Is there a publicity opportunity?

   - Will professionals in other areas of the country want to read about the partnership?

   - What intangible benefits will agencies contribute? Libraries are respected cultural institutions in their communities, which adds value to any partnership.

   - Focus your efforts. Determine which agency will best fulfill the needs of the project and pursue them.

2. Initiate an informal conversation between the library and the potential partner.

   - Contact the potential partner directly, preferably by phone. If you are hesitant about contacting a particular individual or agency, determine if you have a staff person, trustee, friend or family member who is acquainted with the potential partner. Ask that person to help you initiate a dialogue with the potential partner.

- Keep the dialogue with the potential partner going. Understand the concerns of the potential partner, and strive to make the potential partner a long-term ally rather than a one-time friend. Determine what each partner may bring to the partnership which will be critical to a successful project serving seniors.

- What resources are needed to reach the goal? Confirm the partner can provide the required contribution to the effort. Guarantee the library can fulfill its responsibilities to the project. It is wise to keep the library board and administration informed about the partnership and the project and obtain their support.

- Cultivate the right contacts within the organization of your potential partner. In many cases, having the right person to ask at the right time can take care of all other considerations.

3. Begin a courtship with your potential partner.

- Be sure to work with the person who can make the partnership happen. It shows good faith to arrange a visit to the potential partner's place of business. After the meeting send a letter or e-mail thanking the person for his or her time and summarizing the content of the meeting.

- Understand what appeals to the potential partner. What other partnerships has the potential partner formed? What publicity did the partnership generate?

4. Invite a potential partner to an informal meeting.

- Invite the key staff of your potential partner to your library for a brown bag lunch with your staff and a tour of your library This informal meeting will allow you to get to know each other.

- Be flexible and open during discussions. Listen for commonalities and opportunities which will be beneficial to both agencies as well as your senior audience.

- During the informal meetings discuss your individual missions. Determine if there is consensus and synergy. Be honest in the assessment.

5. Establish formal contact and arrange a formal meeting.

- It is important to record minutes of meetings and share them with all who are involved. Letters of agreements, memos of understanding, and contracts are all legal and may be binding.

- View your partner with respect; avoid a competitive attitude.

- The partnership should be a win-win-win relationship, with the older adult population as the ultimate winner.

- Questions and concerns to be addressed during the meeting include:

- What is the ultimate goal of the partnership in relationship to improved services for seniors?

- Work to develop a mutually agreed upon vision and a mission statement.

- Determine if anyone has personal issues concerning any of the potential partners.

- Determine if the project needs a steering committee.

- Determine who will serve on the committee and who will lead it.

- Determine what level of authority the committee leader holds.

- Determine how often and where the meetings will be held.

- Determine if the partnership will exist indefinitely or have a termination date.

- Be ready to compromise (within a defined limit). An "all or nothing" attitude is seldom beneficial.

- Do not commit to anything which you may not be able to accomplish.

6. Formalize roles and responsibilities on certain projects and for the overall partnership.

- Describe the agreed-upon project in writing, noting goals, and recording each partner's contributions and responsibilities. Consider funding, contacts, facility usage, time, personnel, and marketing responsibilities.

- Define how publicity regarding the partnership will be worded. Who will speak with the media concerning the partnership and who is ultimately responsible for developing press releases concerning the collaboration?

- Take actions which will establish trust over time. Trust is achieved through time and experience of the partners working with each other. Always take and distribute notes to all partners. At the beginning of the meeting, call for corrections or additions. This facilitates all partners having the opportunity to know exactly what is happening. Always be open, honest, and committed, and follow through with your stated commitments.

- Use a letter such as the sample provided at the end of the chapter to confirm the initial agreement.

7. Generate ongoing, informal progress reports on how the partnership is benefiting the senior audience. Distribute the reports to library trustees and administration. Partners can distribute them to their agency's stakeholders.

8. Showcase library services and programs that are a result of the partnership.

   - Consider highlighting the partnership project on the library's website, adding a link to the partner's website.

   - Use events such as open-houses and festivals to talk about the services and programs.

   - Promote the cooperative project to the local media, focusing on the role the cooperative element played toward enhancing services to seniors.

   - Consider writing an article about the partnership for professional journals.

9. Keep the lines of communication open and on-going. Always remember to say "Thank You." Find different ways to do this throughout the partnership period. Forward thank-you notes from patrons to partners for programs which they sponsored, have a certificate of appreciation designed for the partner or hold a meet-and-greet for the partner's staff, library personnel and senior participants.

10. Be prepared to end partnerships that are not working. There are times when key personnel leave an organization and the organization's philosophy and responsiveness change. If the organization no longer seems to be a good partner, do not continue the relationship - let it end. However, leave doors open to approach the agency for future cooperative projects.

11. Avoid potentially harmful partnerships. Political organizations, religious groups, and controversial groups which believe the end justifies the means may project the library in a poor light. Establish in your initial research that potential partner organizations do not have a history of offending any minority, ethnic, or religious groups. It is best to avoid partnering with formalized political or religious groups. The library may alienate people and get drawn into their platforms and agendas through association.

Adapted from:

MacLeod, Leo. "Corporate Partnerships: The Art of the Deal." *Oregon Library Association: OLA Quarterly.* 5 (Winter 1999). [Online]. Available: *http://www.ola web.org/quarterly/quar4-4/macleod.html.*

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Partnering With Corporations

Some libraries are hesitant about partnerships between libraries and corporations. Some believe that by accepting large amounts of money, services, or products the library compromises its integrity. In addition, libraries fear partnering with corporations will require them to relinquish some control. Library administrators and trustees must ensure competitive bidding rules are not circumvented and that the partner does not promote its partnership with the library in a way which makes it appear other ventures of the corporation are endorsed by the library.

Don Sager, library author and publisher, concedes that finding a middle ground which "ensures the library's integrity while giving the corporation something tangible" is not easy.

Many libraries accept the challenge of partnering with corporations and experience great success in expanding services or extending resources. The Broward County (Florida) Library maintains over 500 partnerships, most of which are informal. Some partners donate materials, such as books, others donate large sums of money. With the help of its partners, Broward County Library has successfully brought new services and new resources to its community, resulting in a high degree of community support.

Appealing to corporations generally requires a personal contact and a meeting. Below are some ideas relating to the development of the library-corporation partnership.

Tips on Corporate Partnerships

- Be sure the library staff and trustees are comfortable with the corporate partnerships.

- Poll your staff and trustees to determine if they have any connections with the potential corporation.

- Determining which corporation to ask will be situational. Read the community and business sections of the local newspaper and corporate annual reports.

- Pick up the phone and ask! After a list of possible corporate partners has been established and researched, make an initial contact through the corporate public relations department. If there is interest, the partnering process can begin; if there is no interest, other alternatives can be pursued.

- Determine in your initial conversations what the partner's role will be. Both partners should reach consensus before proceeding with the request.

- Keep requests simple and direct. For instance, if the library needs a product, such as cellular phone service, be direct and say, "Will you help the Memorial

Library develop a communication plan which will help senior services outreach staff take computer-reliant library services off-site? By doing this, library staff will be able to demonstrate the Internet to residents of nursing homes."

- Understand and accept the fact that the time required for completion might be longer than desired.

- Agree, in advance, what recognition the corporation will receive. Confirm this with a letter.

- Agree from the initial meeting that, by nature, the partners are two very different organizations. Private corporations seek to make money; libraries are public and seek money to operate effectively. A common goal, however, can be the improvement of the quality of life for older adults.

Collaboration Adds Value

Building relationships with agencies and business that have seniors as customers is possibly the single most important step libraries can take to improve and expand library services to seniors and positively affect their quality of life. Reaching unserved seniors is impossible without agency collaboration. While the task of seeking out and courting partners is time-consuming, the rewards to the library and the senior community and the expansion of resources that accompany partnerships make the effort worthwhile.

Resources

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> Based on the experiences of the Broward County Library (Fort Lauderdale, Florida), which has developed over 500 cooperative agreements, this book provides practical advice and examples of the strategies that lead to successful partnerships.

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> Copies of this report are available to Missouri libraries from the Missouri State Library, Library Development Division.

Sample Follow Up Letter to Confirm Initial Agreement with Partner

<div align="center">

Our Place Library
123 Main Street
Our Place, Missouri 74345
(714) 555-1200

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April 29, 2001

Ms. Sue Fitt, Director
Our Place Parks & Recreation Department
2341 Winding Way Road
Our Place, Missouri 74321

Dear Ms. Fitt,

I am pleased the Parks and Recreation Department has agreed to partner with Our Place Public Library to develop a training program for our respective staffs. As we discussed over lunch last week, the leisure, cultural, and education needs of older adults in our community grow as the senior population grows. Training focused on the aspects of aging and customer service to mature adults will benefit our mutual employees and the senior audience we serve.

Based on my notes from our meeting, we will hire trainers to provide three four-hour workshops during November and December. Themes for the sessions will include:

- the mental, cognitive and physical changes of aging

- learning patterns of older adults

- improving customer service to older adults

Staff from your department will research and hire the trainers. Library staff will develop bibliographies and a display of print materials to supplement the training. Our Place Parks and Recreation Department and the public library will divide the cost of the trainers' fees and expenses equally. The library will provide meeting space and duplication costs for the training materials. Your department will cover the cost of refreshments.

Thank you for cooperating with us to improve services to our community seniors. We appreciate the opportunity to work with your department on this and future projects.

Sincerely,

Ms. Mary Booklady, Director
Our Place Library